

Video nasties lurking on YouTube kids app

DISTURBING:
Characters from
children's shows
such as Peppa Pig
are placed in
unsettling scenarios

By **Jake Hurfurt**
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VIDEO-SHARING site YouTube has been accused of complicity in the abuse of children by targeting them with disturbing and indecent videos through YouTube children's feeds.

Featuring popular children's characters such as Peppa Pig, the alternative versions made by third parties often contain violent scenes, with one 'horror parody' version showing the mother in the show being decapitated.

This week, blogger James Bridle wrote a piece highlighting how YouTube's software had led to a

'Very young children watching on phones'

proliferation of indecent videos targeting children on the site.

Although YouTube says it has tried to clamp down on the videos by blocking advertising revenue, critics have called for further action in a bid to persuade the video giant to act to protect children.

A new policy will place age restrictions on disturbing or inappropriate videos, but only if flagged by viewers, so it is likely some children will see frightening content before it is age-blocked.

As YouTube's search and video recommendations work by using keywords and tags, it is not diffi-

Call for greater controls as it emerges that sick filmmakers edit children's shows in search of clicks and ad cash



UNSETTLING: Videos draw on icons of contemporary children's culture

cult to use these to make content pop up in a playlist.

However, obviously violent content is relatively easy for the Google-owned service to pick up on and block.

Jim Harding, founder of child protection service Bully4U, said: 'There's no age limit. Very young children are watching. The advice would be that unless parents have viewed the content, don't let children of that age view it.'

In his blog, Mr Bridle goes into more detail about videos which, while not as horrifying as the

decapitation of a favourite character, are still disturbing. Videos depicting characters being put in more adult contexts or simply behaving in a way that will unsettle children are common.

As they can't be blocked easily through automated monitoring, they often end up in children's feeds and until recently, as there was no age-inappropriate content, they were difficult to block.

The changes focus on the YouTube Kids app, which automatically removes all age-blocked videos.

Anything flagged under the new

policy aimed at protecting children from potentially disturbing but not inappropriate videos will also be removed from this app.

If a child is using their parent's YouTube account on the full app, however, the videos will still be available.

Mr Bridle was critical of YouTube on his blog, saying it was profiting from the vast numbers of videos and viewers – and from the number of children who are kept quiet with a screen.

Unofficial channels are a major

'Responding to a new style of content'

risk he says, as people post illegally copied versions of legitimate shows regularly. Hidden among this can be more sinister content – he points to a more violent version of Peppa Pig going to the dentist hidden among unauthorised copies of a real episode of the hit show.

By using the right keywords to pop up to an unsuspecting child, it's easy to place a video pretending to

be an innocent episode that actually contains disturbing content in a child's feed.

Mr Bridle said: 'To expose children to this content is abuse.'

He wrote: 'What we're talking about is very young children being targeted with content which will traumatise them, via networks which are extremely vulnerable to exactly this form of abuse.'

'It's not about trolls, but about a kind of violence inherent in the combination of digital systems and capitalist incentives.'

'This is my point: the system is complicit in the abuse. Right now, right here, YouTube and Google are complicit in that system. The architecture they have built to extract the maximum revenue from online video is being hacked by persons unknown to abuse children.'

'I believe they have an absolute responsibility to deal with this.'

Keywords generate views which generate advertising revenue for the channel and for YouTube.

A spokesman for YouTube responded to the charge of complicity, saying it was an 'extraordinary' claim. 'YouTube is for age 13 and up. Anyone under that age should use YouTube Kids, which is much more controlled and doesn't have that kind of content in it.'

She said YouTube had updated its policy to specifically address a new form of content where people were creating content aimed at children and using adult themes.

'We are not complicit in anything and we are responding to a new style of content as responsibly as we possibly can.'

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Chatbot app 'keeps children safe online'

IT'S A dilemma for every parent – how to keep children safe on social media without monitoring every post.

Now developers of a new smartphone app claim to have the answer – a friendly 'bot' that warns youngsters to think again before they send naked photos, explicit messages or personal details online.

The Oyoty app detects when a

By **Jake Hurfurt**

picture shows too much flesh and asks the child to think again. It can send alerts to parents – but the aim is to get the children to curb their own behaviour.

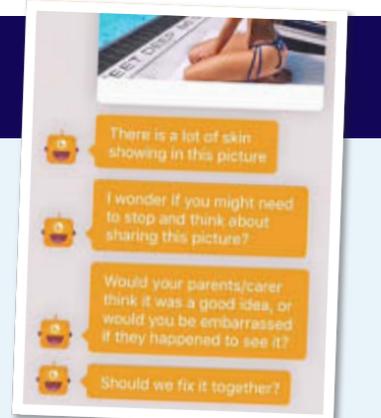
Irish teenagers have the fourth highest rate of sexting in Europe, with one in four post-primary students admitting they have sent

explicit texts. Social media giants such as Facebook and Snapchat have been criticised for failing to tackle the problem.

The app also guards against abusive and bullying language and against revealing sensitive information such as phone numbers. It runs in the background of a phone, sweeping for suspicious posts. If it spots something, a 'chat bot' engages

with the child. In one example, the app – which does not store any text or images – asks: 'There is a lot of skin showing in this picture. I wonder if you might need to stop and think about sharing this?'

Developer Deepak Tewari said: 'This is not about telling children what to do; it is about educating them and helping them to make their own informed choices.'



SAFETY: Helpful Oyoty app